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United States Department of State

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Dear Senator DeConcini:

Thank you for your October 12 inquiry on behalf of your constituent Vincent Oreski regarding Tibet and US sanctions against China.

The U.S. Government strongly opposes human rights abuses in Tibet, as it does in the rest of the world. Grave human rights abuses have occurred there, particularly in 1959 at the time of the Tibetan uprising and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India and again during the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. Many Tibetans perished in the course of armed clashes with Chinese troops, or from famine, mistreatment, and incarceration. A great many others suffered not only physical abuse and hardship, but also from attempts by Red Guards to eradicate Tibet's cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage.

Beginning in 1980, the Chinese publicly recognized that their earlier policies and actions had been excessively harsh and adopted more liberal policies towards Tibet. In the mid-eighties, modest improvements in conditions were recognized even by the Dalai Lama.

Recent events have again focused attention on Tibet. Since October 1987, there have been sporadic demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, by ethnic Tibetans in Lhasa and elsewhere. The Chinese have suppressed the demonstrations, at times with lethal force. The U.S. Government deplored the use of excessive force in suppressing demonstrations in Lhasa in December 1988 and March 1989, which ended in the Chinese imposing martial law in portions of Tibet. We have urged the Chinese to exercise restraint in order to avoid future bloodshed.

Severe restrictions on political and religious activity remain in effect in Tibet. Nevertheless, in recent months there have been some encouraging developments. The religious holidays and anniversary dates in March passed without serious incident, breaking the cycle of violence that had plagued Tibet since 1987. Martial law was lifted on May 1, and although troops remain in nearby barracks, the security force presence in Lhasa has been scaled back. A number of foreign officials,

The Honorable
Dennis DeConcini,
United States Senate.

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including a Congressional staff delegation and several State Department officers, have been allowed to visit. More recently, the Chinese have resumed allowing foreign journalists to cover events in Tibet. We are hopeful that these steps will lead to a restoration of the positive momentum that characterized the situation in Tibet in the mid-eighties.

The U.S. Government remains deeply concerned about respect for human rights in Tibet, and for Tibetans elsewhere in China. We have raised this issue with Chinese authorities repeatedly, at both senior and working levels. Secretary Baker raised the subject of human rights abuses in Tibet during talks with Foreign Minister Qian in Beijing in February 1989. National Security Advisor Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary Eagleburger discussed Tibetan issues with Chinese leaders during their visits in July and December 1989. Several members of Congress visited Tibet in 1988 and conveyed our views on the seriousness of human rights abuse in China, including Tibet. They reiterated our concern for the treatment of detainees and asked the Chinese Government to give foreigners more access to Tibet.

The United States, like other governments, considers Tibet to be a part of China, with the status of an autonomous region. We do not recognize the Dalai Lama as leader of a government in exile. At the same time, we deeply respect him as a religious leader, and as an eloquent spokesman for the human rights of the Tibetan people. The Chinese and the Dalai Lama have both expressed an interest in resuming dialogue toward resolving their differences on Tibet. Although we have not taken a position on substance, we also would welcome such a dialogue.

The U.S. Government will continue to do all it can to encourage respect for the dignity of man and internationally recognized human rights in Tibet, as in the rest of China.

I hope this information will be helpful to you in responding to your constituent.

Sincerely,



Janet G. Mullins
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure:

Correspondence returned.

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